United Nations A/HRC/39/NGO/151

General Assembly

Distr.: General
10 September 2018

English only

Human Rights Council
Thirty-ninth session
10-28 September 2018
Agenda item 2
Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Written statement* submitted by the United Nations Watch, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 August 2018]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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The Record of the High Commissioner in Combating Antisemitism

In early July 2018, one of the most prominent UN human rights officials—Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion—sounded an alarm when he acknowledged that the United Nations human rights system has paid a "scandalous lack of attention" to the worldwide plague of escalating antisemitism. This disturbing conclusion is confirmed by United Nations Watch's new report entitled *The United Nations and Antisemitism: 2008-2017 Report Card*, which carefully reviewed the responses to antisemitism over the past decade by numerous UN agencies, experts and senior officials.[1] Our findings concerning outgoing High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Hussein are summarized below.

Disregard of Antisemitism

Surprisingly, while Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein has been invited to address the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, his record is one of almost complete disregard when it comes to fighting antisemitism.

Indeed, a review of all of Zeid's official statements, press releases, reports and legal briefs as listed on his UN website (www.ohchr.org), as well as a search of news articles on the LexisNexis database, turns up not a single stand-alone statement by Zeid that reacts to antisemitic attacks or incitement.

This omission is particularly noticeable on the Twitter account of Zeid's office (@unhumanrights). Just looking at the numbers, Zeid's office posted a total of 20 tweets mentioning Muslims or Islam; none mentioning Jews or Judaism; and three referencing antisemitism—one of these being a general post that also mentioned Islamophobia, and the other two relating to the 2017 Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Similarly, Zeid's office posted two tweets about the Holocaust that did not refer to antisemitism—one on the 2018 Holocaust Remembrance Day that universalized the Holocaust, and the second likening today's Western treatment of migrants to the treatment of Jews seeking to escape 1930s Germany.

Thus, while Zeid's tweets about Muslims expressed concern over current threats to Muslims—such as violence against Muslims in India, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, or laws in Austria and France perceived to be anti-Muslim—his few tweets about antisemitism and the Holocaust either did not concern Jews at all, or were in the context of Holocaust Remembrance Day. Sadly, Zeid ignored current threats to Jews.

Holocaust Denial and Trivialization

During the course of his tenure, Zeid trivialized and de-Judaized the Holocaust. According to Holocaust scholar Deborah Lipstadt, attempts to de-Judaize the Holocaust amount to a form of softcore Holocaust denial. In his annual UN Holocaust Remembrance Day statements, he never referred to the Holocaust as a national tragedy of the Jewish people in which six million Jews were systematically murdered, and did not draw any lessons from the antisemitism that led to the Holocaust in regard to current antisemitic attacks against Jews. Instead, Zeid used the Holocaust as a platform to discuss the problem of racism and discrimination generally, only twice mentioning modern antisemitism in that general context. For example, in January 2015, just two weeks after the deadly attack on a Kosher supermarket in Paris in which four Jews were killed, Zeid made no mention of modern antisemitism or of the attack, instead referring broadly to the "millions of Jewish men, women and children, as well as Roma, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war and other prisoners and deportees from all over Europe…"

Aside from his Holocaust Remembrance Day Statements, Zeid used the Holocaust to create a false moral equivalency between Europe's treatment of Muslim migrants today and its treatment of the Jews desperate to flee Hitler in 1938.

Zeid's only tweet mentioning the word "Jewish," was in March 2015 in the context of criticizing Europe for exploitation of migrants: "1938 Evian conf: #Hitler wanted to move Jewish pop out of #Germany. Countries didn't want to import 'racial pb' Then Holocaust happened."[2] The tweet offensively deflects blame from Hitler for the

1 See report, "The United Nations and Antisemitism: 2008-2017 Report Card," available at https://www.unwatch.org/report-un-ignored-antisemitism-decade/.

2 UN Human Rights (@UNHumanRights), Twitter (March 12, 2015, 10:53 AM), https://twitter.com/UNHumanRights/status/576078545811873792

Holocaust, and trivializes the Holocaust by comparing Europe's failure to save the Jews in 1938, who were then beginning to be subjected to genocide by Hitler, to its current treatment of Muslim migrants.

In October 2015, Zeid employed the same analogy to criticize the UK's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, saying: "If you just look back to the Evian conference and read through the intergovernmental discussion, you will see that there were things that were said that were very similar [to what UK officials said about Syrian migrants]."[3] Senior British politicians rightly rejected this comparison, calling it "offensive," "overblown," "disgusting," and "obscene."[4]

Astonishingly, while freely using the Holocaust to advocate for the rights of Muslims fleeing war-torn Syria for a better life in Europe, Zeid has ignored the dangers some of these migrants pose to local Jewish communities, as they come from an antisemitic culture that denies the Holocaust, dehumanizes Jews, and incites the murder of Jews. For example, in June 2018, a migrant from Syria admitted in court that he attacked an Israeli man wearing a Kipa, a Jewish religious head covering, in Berlin. The 19-year-old man, named in German media as Knaan al-S., lashed out with his belt at the victim in broad daylight in a street in the German capital. Not only is Zeid's ignoring of this threat insulting to Jews, but it undermined his authority as the highest human rights official.

Another example of Zeid's trivialization of the Holocaust is his opening speech to the June 2017 session of the Human Rights Council, when he juxtaposed Hitler's concentration camps to Palestinian refugee camps. Though Zeid claimed the Holocaust had no equal, he chose to evoke the Holocaust, and not any of the hundreds of other conflicts around the world, when discussing the plight of the Palestinians in the Arab-Israeli conflict.[5]

Thus, while Zeid instrumentalized the Holocaust to criticize Israel, he never once used the memory and lesson of the Holocaust to defend Jews against modern antisemitism. We hope that incoming High Commissioner Michelle Bachelet will be more forceful in fighting antisemitism.

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3 Sam Jones, "Refugee rhetoric echoes 1938 summit before Holocaust, UN official warns," *The Guardian*, Oct. 14, 2014.

4 James Black and Ian Drury, "Outrage as UN says Britain's refugees policy is like 1930s: Senior official claims response has echoes of the way Jews were treated under the Nazis," *Daily Mail*, Oct. 15, 2015.

5 "U.N. rights chief compares Palestinians with Holocaust victims, refugee camps," *UN Watch*, June 9, 2017, https://www.unwatch.org/u-n-rights-chief-compares-palestinians-holocaust-victims-refugee-camps-auschwitz/.